

TOOLBOX

Beating Compulsive/Addictive Behaviors

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What is a compulsive behavior? -- Anything that has more power over you than you have over it. Anything you do that you don't want to do, but can't seem to stop despite adverse consequences. Compulsive/addictive behaviors are not about the behavior itself, but about altering, escaping, numbing one's mood. Examples of compulsive behaviors include: pornography/masturbation, emotional affairs, serial affairs, alcohol, overeating, anger, etc.

Necessary Components of Addiction Recovery:

(1) Therapy (individual, couple and group), (2) 12-step group support and working the steps, (3) Defining and setting healthy boundaries, (4) Honesty and transparency, (5) Humility, (6) Accountability, (7) A willingness to surrender, (8) Getting educated about the addiction and the recovery process, (9) Spiritual guidance, (10) One day at a time.

- **PLAN OF ACTION.** Create a plan of action for your day (i.e. affirmations, exercise, self-care, etc.). What actions will you take today to fill your day with good things and avoid vulnerable states of being.
- **AVOID TRIGGER EMOTIONS.** Plan into your daily routine things that will help you avoid the following "BLAHST" states of being --
 1. **B**ored
 2. **L**onely
 3. **A**ngry
 4. **H**ungry
 5. **S**tressed
 6. **T**ired
- **HEALTHY HABITS.** Develop daily healthy habits to crowd out negative/unwanted behaviors. (See "Healthy Habits Worksheet.")
 1. Sleep
 2. Water
 3. Nutrition/Healthy food and fuel
 4. Exercise
 5. Healthy mental food/Positive self-talk/Affirmations
 6. Relaxation and fun
 7. Reading uplifting materials
 8. Spirituality
 9. Service
 10. Developing skills and talents
 11. Other self care
- **DAILY AFFIRMATIONS/HEALTHY MESSAGES.** Feed your mind healthy messages daily (especially early morning

and before bed). Read them out loud or write them out. Make them positive, specific, present tense:

1. I'm in charge of my thoughts.
 2. I'm okay.
 3. I'm doing the best I can and my best is good enough.
 4. God and I together can overcome my challenges and weaknesses!
 5. I can be myself and be loved.
 6. I can ask for what I want and need.
 7. I can make mistakes.
 8. I can think about what I want.
 9. I can feel all of my emotions and have needs.
 10. I can take my time.
 11. I can play and have fun.
 12. I can be spontaneous.
 13. I can be creative.
 14. I can trust others.
 15. I can relax and let go.
 16. etc.
- **12-STEP PRAYERS.** Write out or read your favorite 12-step prayers every day, i.e.:
 1. **3rd Step Prayer** -- *God, I offer myself to Thee, to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!*
 2. **7th Step Prayer** -- *My Creator, I am now willing that You should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that You now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to Thee and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here to do Thy bidding.*
 - **THERAPEUTIC ASSISTANCE.** Addiction recovery generally requires participation in the following:
 1. **Individual Therapy** -- to address the related personal issues.

2. **Couples/Relationship/Family Therapy** -- to address the related personal and relational issues.
 3. **12-Step Support Groups** (i.e. Sexaholics Anonymous (SA.org), Alcoholics Anonymous (AA.org), Overeater's Anonymous (OA.org), LDS Addiction Recovery Program, etc.) -- to utilize more easily accessible education and needed support.
 4. **Group Therapy Addiction Recovery Programs** (i.e. LifeStar Sexual Addiction Recovery Program) -- to receive educational insights as well as assistance with personal issues. Group therapy provides a vital sense of shared struggle, while helping to diminish destructive shame.
- **ADDRESS THINKING ERRORS.** Identify and challenge common thinking errors:
 1. All-or-Nothing/Black-or-White thinking
 2. Jumping to Conclusions
 3. Personalizing/Blaming self
 4. Overgeneralizing
 5. Mental Filters -- Maximizing the Negative/Minimizing the Positive
 6. Mind-reading
 7. Exaggerating
 8. Labeling & Mislabeling
 9. Shoulding
 10. Emotional Reasoning -- feelings over facts
 - **CONNECT WITH YOUR EMOTIONS.** Do the "9 Core Emotions" exercise daily with yourself and/or another supportive person to identify and reconnect with emotions that often get stuffed or shut out.
 - **PROCESS WRITING/NOTEBOOK THERAPY.** Spend at least a few minutes daily to free-write whatever you are thinking/experiencing that is causing stress. Many clients find it helpful to either write letters to others that they don't actually send in order to be "heard" by them, or write letters to God regarding whatever is on your mind. The process of writing utilizes both the right and left brain, and helps to process, sort out and often dissolve difficult emotions and issues.
 - **CLEAR OUT ANGER/RESENTMENT.** Write a "Feelings Letter" to anyone you have anger or resentment towards. Accumulating anger and resentment feeds compulsive behavior.
 - **KEEP GRATITUDE JOURNAL.** Keep a daily Gratitude Journal by writing down at least 5 things you are grateful for every day. This can shift mood and help train your mind to see more positives.
 - **RECORD SUCCESSES.** Record your successes. Keep a success log of times you resist the compulsive behavior.
 - **STOP THE SHAMING.** Identify and guard against the self-loathing of shame and self-blame. Shame feeds compulsive behavior and addiction. Read books such as: *I Thought It Was Just Me (but it isn't)* by Brene Brown or *Letting Go of Shame* by Ronald Potter-Efron.
 - **PREVENT SLIPS.** When you do slip up, write out a "Slip Prevention/Recovery Form" regarding the slip to learn from your mistakes. Answer the following questions:
 1. What were my triggers?
 2. What emotions were I experiencing at the time?
 3. What were my automatic thoughts?
 4. What are some "rational responses" to the automatic thoughts?
 5. What is a statement to challenge the automatic thought?
 6. What were the behaviors that lead up to the slip?
 7. What are the negative consequences of the slip?
 8. What healthy living tactics and new behaviors will I incorporate into my life?
 9. What are the positive consequences of these new healthy behaviors?
 - **SHARE SLIPS.** When you slip, tell someone as soon as you can. This can stop the downward cycle. Shame and secrecy are the lifeblood of compulsive behavior.
 - **DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT.** Help break unhealthy or unproductive patterns by doing, thinking or saying something different than what you would normally do, think or say in a given situation.
 - **BREATHE DEEPLY.** Stop and breathe to slow down your mind and ground yourself to be more present. Put your hand on your lower abdomen and breathe deeply--expanding your diaphragm. Inhale counting to 8, hold for 4, exhale for 8. This relaxation technique can not only slow your automatic thoughts, but also help you gain greater control over your choices.
 - **CREATE PERSONAL TOOL KIT.** Create a personal tool kit with items to help you stay on track. Review it daily. This kit may include any or all of the following: a letter to yourself outlining your goals and commitments, photos of loved ones/places/events, books, quotes, affirmations (3x5 cards), music, other meaningful personal items (i.e. a special gift, memento, souvenir, etc. that brings positive memories) that can help you stay focused on the life you want to create.
 - **RULE OUT PHYSIOLOGICAL ISSUES.** Go see an expert on mental and physical health to rule out physiological issues (i.e. Dr. Scott Hoopes, ScottHoopesMD.com).
 - **COMMIT TO RECOVERY.** Be committed to full recovery. Give it 100% effort.